Mae Jemison, Doctor, Scientist, Astronaut

Dr. Mae Jemison poses in flight gear before launch of the space shuttle. © *NASA*

When Mae Carol Jemison watched the televised flights of Gemini and Apollo spacecraft as a child, she knew someday she would go to space. Her certainty was remarkable since it would be more than a decade before an American woman or any African American left Earth's atmosphere.

Born in Decatur, Alabama, in 1956, Jemison spent most of her young life in Chicago. Her mother taught in the Chicago public school system, and Jemison credits her parents' encouragement of education and exploration for her life in science. After attending Stanford University in California and graduating from Cornell Medical College in New York, Jemison became a Peace Corps medical officer and worked in Liberia and Sierra Leone for two years.

Jemison was inspired to apply to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) by two figures, one real and one fictional: Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, and Lieutenant Uhura, the African-American female crew member in the *Star Trek* television series

Jemison loved as a child. As a mission specialist for the September 1992 trip of the space shuttle Endeavour, Jemison became the first African-American woman in space.

Since her groundbreaking spaceflight, Jemison has worked to encourage children toward careers in the sciences. In 2009, she participated with President Obama in a White House stargazing party and joined Michelle Obama to talk to youth in underprivileged schools about the importance of education. "When I grew up, in the 1960s," Jemison wrote in the *New York Times*, "the only American astronauts were men. Looking out the window of that space shuttle, I thought if that little girl growing up in Chicago could see her older self now, she would have a huge grin on her face."

Dr. Mae Jemison, the first black woman in space, at the world premiere of the film *Star Trek Nemesis*.
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